

The PORT of ARGOSTOLI

From Past to Present



A project by A3 Class Students of
1st General Lyceum of Argostoli, Kefalonia
GREECE



This ebook is one of the final outputs of the KA229 Erasmus+ project entitled "People Organizing Redevelopment Technology and Sustainability", which was carried out from 2019 until 2022.

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How it all started...

Argostoli is the capital town of Kefalonia, with a population of about 10,000 people. It is situated on the south-west coast of the island, upon a sheltered bay which blends into the Koutavos Lagoon, home to a rich variety of flora and fauna. As a natural harbour, one of the few in the entire Mediterranean, it became the capital of the island in 1757. But how did this happen?

Before that 1757, the capital of the island was the Venetian Castle of St George. The castle, originally built by the Byzantines in the 12th century, was fortified by the Venetians who occupied the island in 1500. It became the island's capital and administrative centre as it offered protection against frequent pirate attacks.



St George's Castle



Gravour of Argostoli, 1757

After the [Naval Battle of Lepanto](#) in 1571, the Mediterranean coasts became safer and Greek commerce and shipping started growing. As a result, people gradually moved to coastal areas that offered natural protection, such as the coastline around Koutavos Lagoon, at the east end of Argostoli bay. Gradually, the small fishermen's village in the area expanded and became more organised, including a dock, proper houses that replaced the old huts and churches.



An aerial view of Argostoli bay

It took some time for the Venetian government to realise that the sheltered bay upon which the small town of Argostoli sat, providing protection as well as trading opportunities, was the ideal spot for building the new capital of the island. In 1757, despite numerous objections by the nobles and locals, the administrative centre was moved from the St George's Castle to Argostoli.

[Argostoli](#) developed into one of the busiest ports in [Greece](#), leading to prosperity and growth. Today the municipal unit of Argostoli comprises an area of 157.670 km² and a population of 10,633 according to the 2011 census.

De Bosset Bridge before the earthquake of 1953



De Bosset Bridge is a stone bridge built in 1813 over the bay of Argostoli. At 689.9 meters, it is the longest stone bridge over the sea in the world. When the the Ionian Islands were under British patronage, part of the occupation costs were reimbursed in the form of infrastructure projects. In 1810, the Swiss engineer Charles Philip de Bosset, who was appointed as the island governor by the British who occupied the Ionian Islands at the time, placed emphasis of his activity on the road and bridge construction. Numerous connections were shortened with bridges. The biggest project, however, was the bridge over the bay of Argostoli to Drapano, which shortened the way to Lixouri and the north of the island. It separates Koutavos lagoon from the rest of Argostoli bay.

In 1812, De Bosset presented his idea of a bridge to the island council, which had to confirm the construction. Counterargument was that the bridge could give robbers a slight escape route, since its northern end is (then as today) unpopulated. In a meeting, De Bosset struck a sword on the table and proclaimed that if necessary he could cut treaties with his sword.

When Ch. J. Napier (1822-1830) was surveyor on the island, he finished the bridge, but the bridge took its final form several years later, under the surveillance of British Baron C. J. D' Everton (1842-1848). The administration, having recognized its usefulness, decided to completely reconstruct it piece by piece with stone. The bridge pavement was loaded on 16 low stone arches.

The first cars appeared on the bridge in the 1920s. In 1931, the regional road of Koutavos was built, so fewer cars crossed bridge.

During World War II, the bridge was further damaged. In 1940, the Italian bombing caused cracks in the bridge. In 1944, the Germans placed explosive devices along the waterfront and the bridge of Argostoli. They intended to set them on fire, when they would leave the island in September of the same year. However, they were watched by local militants in collaboration with Italian and Slovenian soldiers, who cut the cables and saved the bridge and the city.



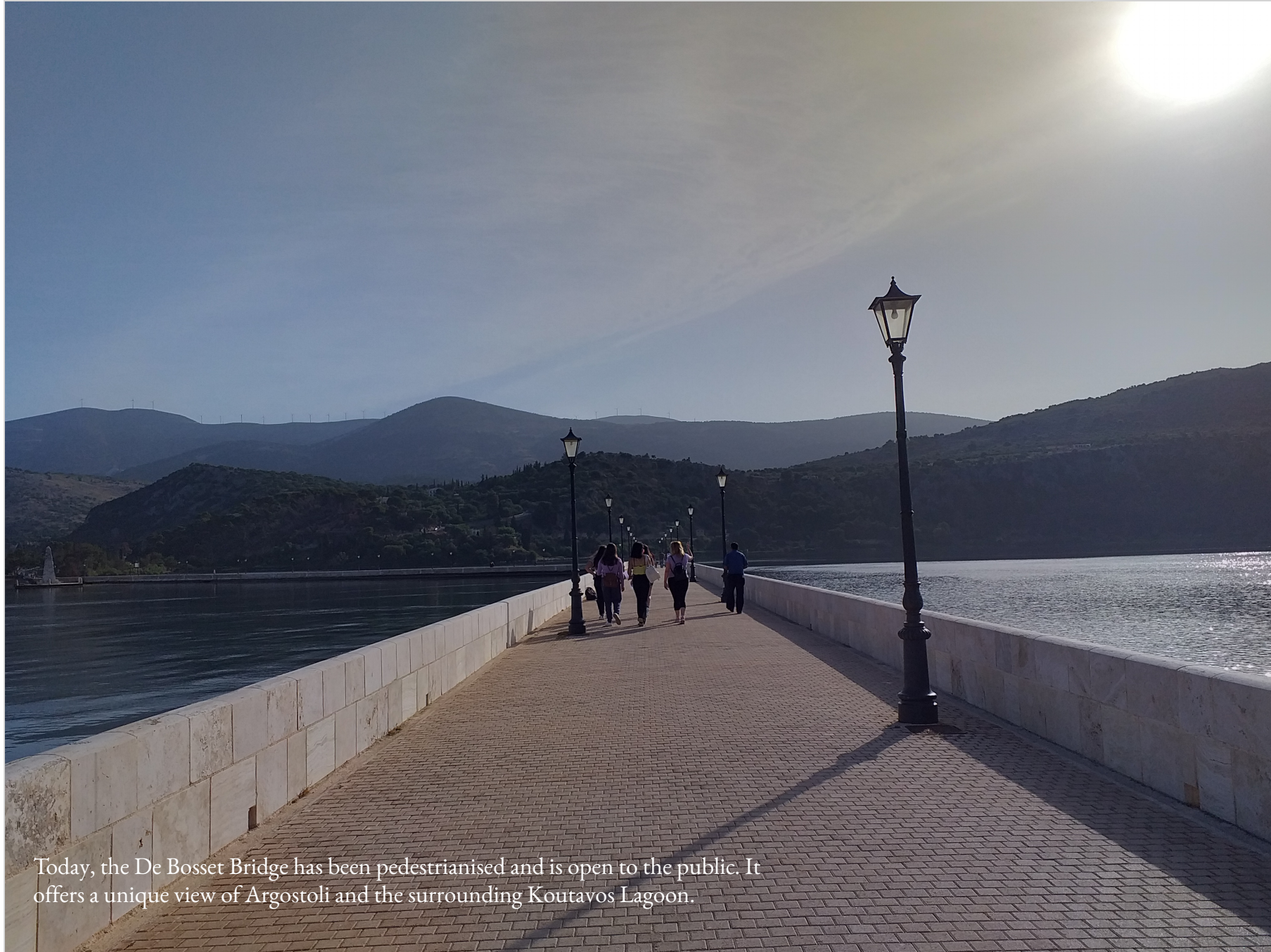
De Bosset Bridge: From the 1953 earthquake until today

The earthquake of 1953 caused significant damage to the bridge, such as extensive deck collapses, intense sedimentation and local collapses. During the 1960s and 1970s, parts of the bridge were completely rebuilt.

In 2005, a study of the strengthening and restoration of the bridge was carried out by the Laboratory of Soil Engineering, Foundations and Geotechnical Seismic Engineering of the University of Athens, under the auspices of the Directorate of Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Monuments of the EPAO.

"The interventions proposed," the researchers say, "were recently implemented, prior to the strong earthquakes that hit Kefalonia on 26/01/2014 and 03/02/2014, respectively, contributing to the very good behavior of De Bosset bridge without observed damage or failures, despite the high acceleration values recorded".

Today, the bridge has been pedestrianised and is open to the public. Locals and tourists can go for a walk and enjoy the green surrounding landscape combined with the calm waters of Koutavos lagoon. At sunset, the sky is filled with shades of



Today, the De Bosset Bridge has been pedestrianised and is open to the public. It offers a unique view of Argostoli and the surrounding Koutavos Lagoon.

The Obelisk of De Bosset Bridge: a landmark of Argostoli



The iconic Obelisk or "Colona" (Greek word for 'column') was built by De Bosset, who wished to set up a monument in honour of the British nation, under whose command the most important work of the bridge was carried out.



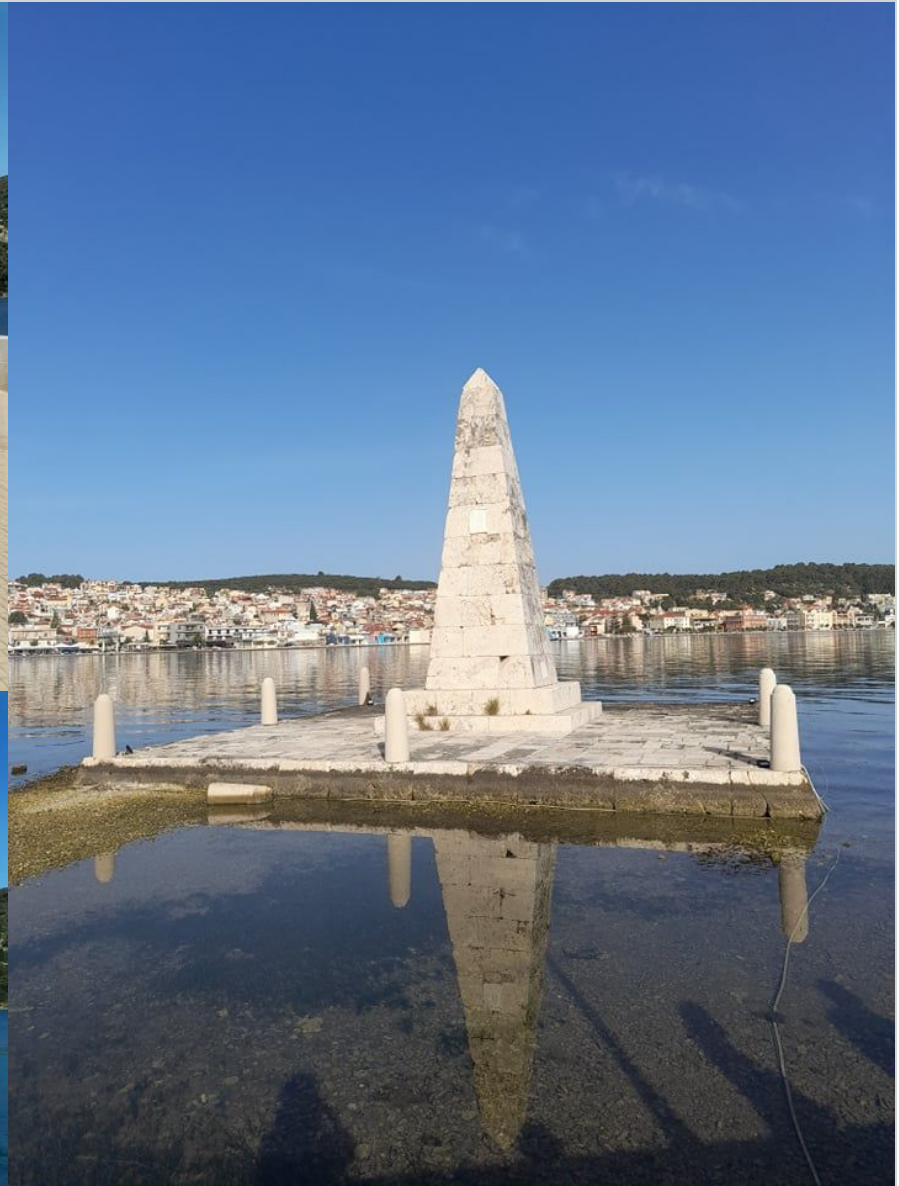
Where the waters are shallower, a square stone base was formed, which was surrounded by 12 columns, and in the middle of it an obelisk was placed in two tiers made of pieces of hard stone, with the inscription " ΤΗ ΔΟΞΗ ΤΩΝ ΒΡΕΤΤΑΝΩΝ ΟΙ ΚΕΦΑΛΛΗΝΕΣ ΑΩΙΓ" in Greek, Latin, English and Italian on its four sides, which means "to the glory of the British, the people of Cephalonia 1813".

De Bosset Bridge: Then and Now



De Bosset Bridge and the Obelisk before and after the devastating 1953 earthquake





The Obelisk and the bridge today, after the recent reconstruction of 2016

Volunteers of Wildlife Sense team recording sea turtles in Koutavos Lagoon



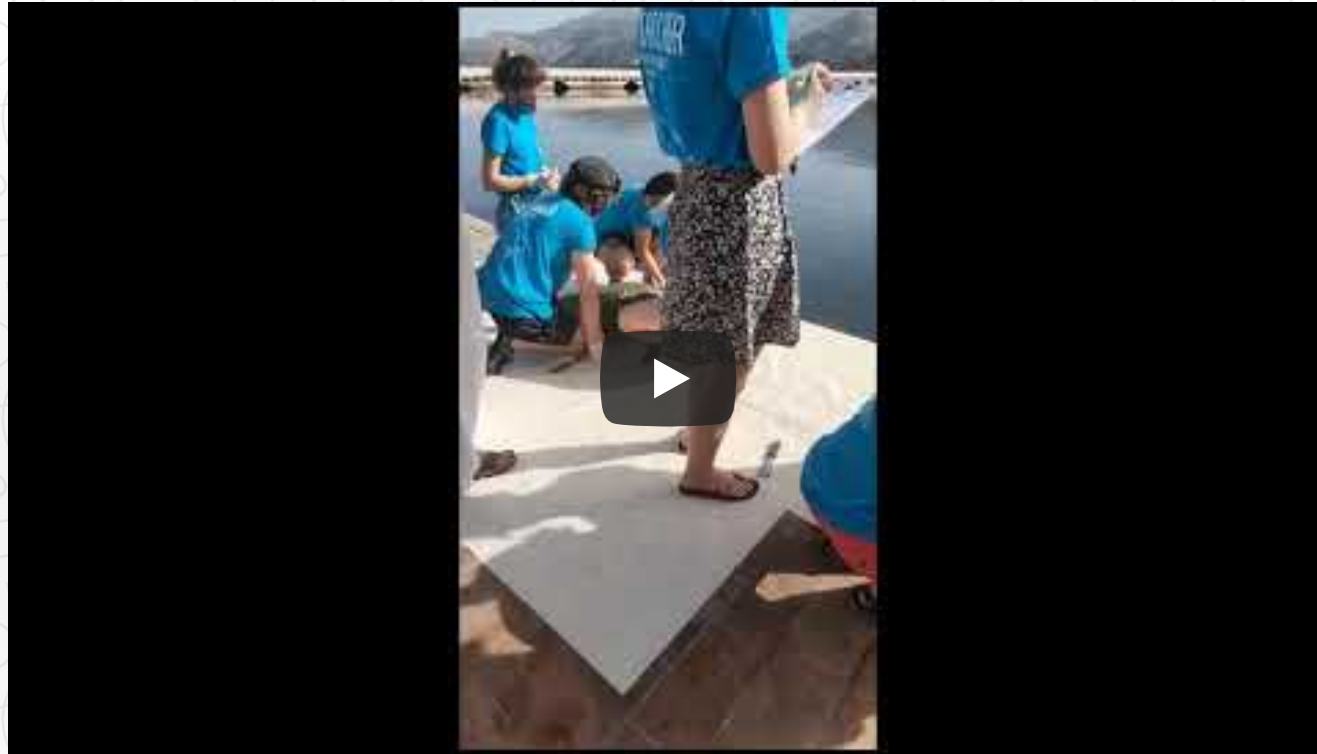
Sea turtles in the port of Argostoli

During our field trip along the port of Argostoli, we came across a team of volunteers from [Wildlife Sense](#), an organisation for the protection of the endangered Careta Careta (loggerhead) sea turtles of Kefalonia carrying out some field research near De Bosset Bridge. The head of the team was happy to offer us some interesting information about the sea turtles. We were surprised to hear that over 200 sea turtles have been recorded and tracked in the bay of Argostoli. Loggerhead sea turtles have a life span of up to 80 years, but this is usually reduced to about 30 years due to human activity. Sea turtles are often injured or killed by accidental boat strikes, entrapment in fishing gear, or after swallowing plastics.

Spotting some Careta Careta turtles in the bay!



Spotting some sea turtles swimming amongst a group of seagulls in the bay near De Bosset bridge. Thanks to the tag, the Wildlife Sense volunteer can recognise the turtle. His name is Bruno!



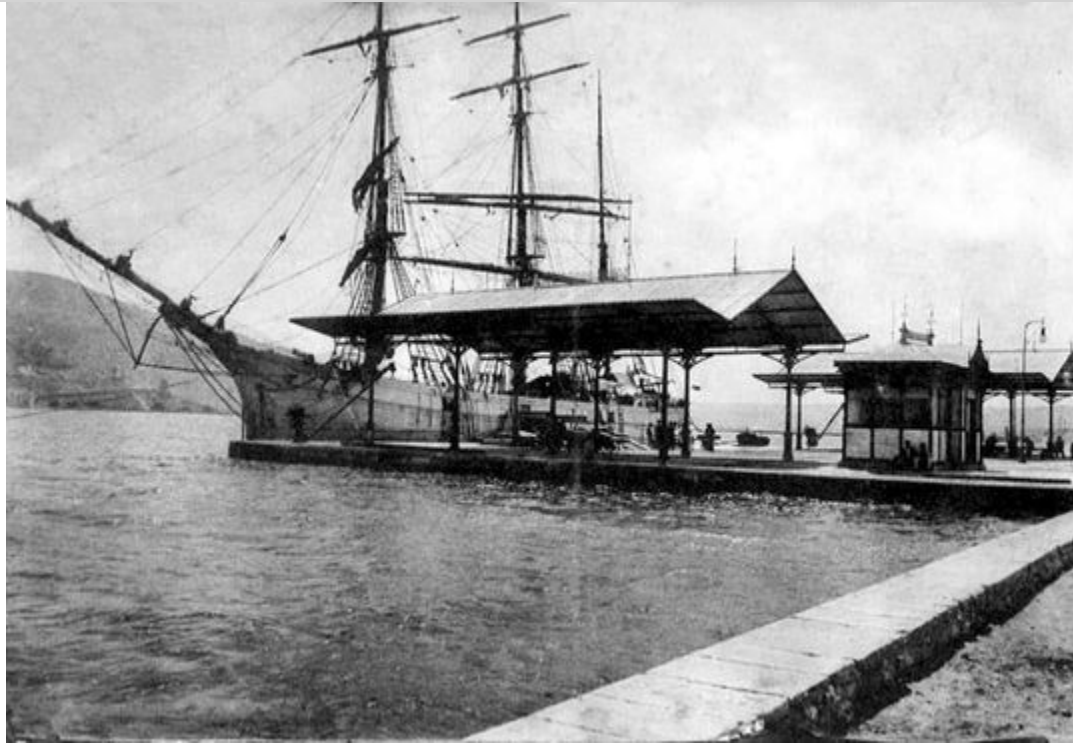
Watch an extract from our interview with the team leader of the Wildlife Sense environmental group, giving us some interesting information about their work with Loggerhead (*Caretta Careta*) sea turtles on the island of Kefalonia.

The Old Port of Argostoli



During Venetian occupation, the port of Argostoli was a trading post for the Venetian authorities, who wanted more control than could be done from St. George's Castle to meet the needs of the people, the market and the money of the time. This was the reason why the port became the later capital and the whole city gathered around it and of course around its pier.

The English commissioner Sir Charles James Napier was involved in the construction of the port, amongst other public works. Construction of the waterfront began in 1822 and was completed in a short time at a cost of only \$130, turning the hitherto muddy shore into a comfortable pier and promenade. Thus the waterfront of about 2.5 km was created and paved with long stone platforms brought from the site of Ancient Krani (one of the four ancient city-states of Kefalonia).



Dogana in 1915 with the characteristic slabs along the coastline, some of which as mentioned above were saved and placed post-earthquake along the beach

On the far east of the port there was the first customs building that was constructed by Napier. It was constructed in 1910 and it was later named ***Dogana***. The building consisted of two iron sheds and was located where the Port Authority building is today approximately. Sometime in the early 1930s, they were consolidated with a concrete slab, which did not collapse in the 1953 earthquake, although the iron sheds fell.

The port may not have been very big, but it was used from small boats and fishing boats to large passenger ships. The latter moored away from the dock due to the shallow waters of the port and there were certain boatmen whose job was to carry the people and goods to and from the city.

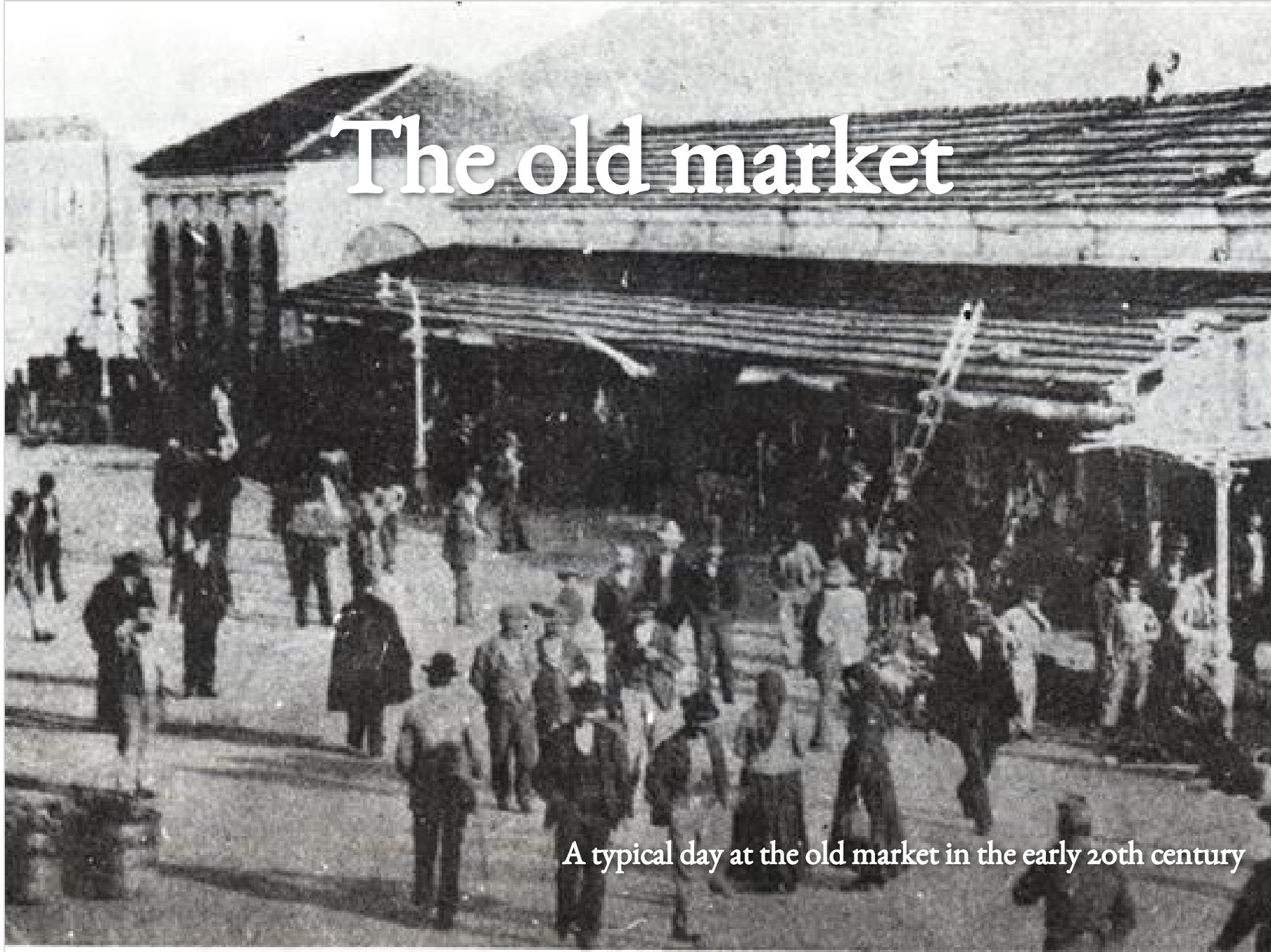


Images from a lost city: The old port of Argostoli in the early 20th century

On Sundays, people used to take a stroll along the seafront or sit and enjoy their coffee or ginger beer (a refreshing ginger scented fizzy drink still produced in Corfu) at one of the popular seaside coffee shops ("kafencia").



The old market



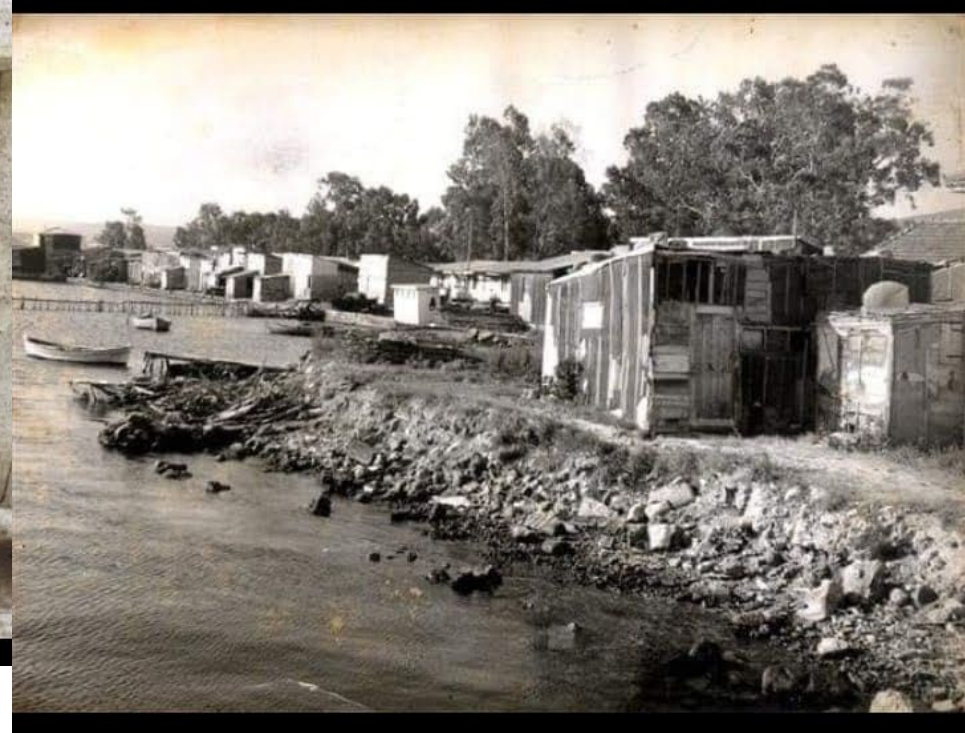
A typical day at the old market in the early 20th century

The market shortly after 1953

After the year 1953 which destroyed the old market buildings, and before modern architecture, seaside shops were made out of wood and were the sizes of small 5x5 houses. They were built close to the port, at the shore Koutavos lagoon.



One of the old butcher's shops of Argostoli



Wooden seaside shops after the 1953 earthquake

Fun Fact

After the 1953 earthquakes, there were no barber shops and so, if a person wanted to get a shave or haircut, there was a distinct place at the market where they would go to, which was in the wilderness under a tree!



Barbers giving a shave under the trees at the old market

The port of Argostoli today



Many ships are anchored in the port of Argostoli. The most regular route is the one connecting Argostoli to the nearby town of Lixouri. There is also a commercial port for cargo ships traveling to and from the mainland of Greece. Up until 2014, there were ferry boat connections between Argostoli and the port of Killini in the mainland of Greece. Many private yachts anchor at the port during the summer.

Most of Argostoli harbour front is lined with palm trees and laid with an attractive design of black and white pebbles. While taking a walk on it in the morning, one can admire the fishing boats that display their morning catches. In addition, many sea turtles can be seen during the summer, and these turtles belong to the endangered species called *Caretta Caretta* (loggerhead turtle).

The buildings surrounding the port are taverns, restaurants, plenty of hotels and many tourist shops. The port authority is southern of the parking lot of the port, while northern of the port there is the Nautical Sports' Club center (called NOA) where members of the club can exercise and practice rowing or kayak. Especially in the summer, it is really common to see athletes rowing in the bay of Argostoli.

Other important buildings at the sea front are the Public Enterprise of Electricity (ΔEH in Greek) and the Old People's home of Argostoli.



Sailing practice at the Nautical Club of Argostoli



An aerial view of the port



Fishermen at the port displaying their morning catches at the dock



A shoal of tiny fish swimming next to a fishing boat



If you take a walk along the seafront in the mornings, there is a good chance that you will come across careta careta sea turtles swimming around the fishing boats, looking for food.

Cargo ships, yachts and ferry boats at the port of Argostoli



Having coffee while enjoying the serenity of the port...



The Cruise Ship Terminal (“Bastouni”)

The Cruise Ship Terminal of Argostoli Port, known as Bastouni, is a fairly recent addition to the port. It was constructed between 2007 and 2010 and it consists of main parts:

- The cruise ship mooring area, which includes three jetties, a central one and two smaller ones.
- A long corridor (171,5 m long and 8 m wide) which is used for the embarkation and disembarkation of passengers and provides access to the docked cruise ships.
- A reception area which includes a terminal building and an open-air theatre. Lots of cultural events take place there in the summer.

The new pier has only one berth. When it is occupied by a cruise ship, the other ship is anchored in the bay and its passengers are transported to the old harbour via the ship's tender boats.

In summer months cruise ships and luxurious yachts are a daily sight at “Bastouni”.



A memorial erected in 2020 at the Cruise Ship Terminal "in memory of Kefalonian Mariners who perished at sea for family, country and allies during the Second World War 1939 - 1945".

Memorials at "Bastouni"



Paying homage to Russian allies
who supported the Greek fight for
independence



The terminal building and the open-air theatre at "Bastouni" which hosts local cultural events during summer months.



The Merchant Marine Academy of the Ionian Islands, situated at the seafront near the Cruise Ship Terminal. It was founded in 1975 and it is one of the eight National Merchant Maritime Academies for Deck Officers in the country.



The bust of Kefalonian poet Nikos Kavvadias (1910 - 1975) at the port of Argostoli.



The statue of Nikos Kavvadias

The bust of Nikos Kavvadias is located in a paved area of the port of Argostoli. It is on a rock and it is made brass. On his left arm, there is the name of the sculptor, Nikos Icaris as well as the date of the construction (1983). Behind statue there is the Greek flag. The erection of the bust was initiated by the Kefalonian Association of New York "Kefalos".

Nikos Kavvadias was poet and writer. He was born in 1910 in Manchuria of Russia. Both of his parents were of Kefallonian origin. In 1914 the whole family moves to Piraeus. Kavvadias likes reading books and he soon starts writing and publishing his poems. In 1928 he starts working as a sailor. During World War II, he fought against the Germans. He published many poetry collections and he became famous as the poet of sea. A lot of his poems were set to music. He died in Athens in 1975.



Nikos Kavvadias - A knife ("Ena mahairi")
Music: Thanos Mikroutsikos
Performed by: Vassilis Papakonstantinou

This poem by Nikos Kavvadias, which was skillfully turned into a song by composer Thanos Mikroutsikos, tells the story of a cursed knife sold by an Algerian merchant to a Greek sailor. The old merchant who narrates the story warns the sailor of the curse that is cast on each person owing the knife. However, the intrigued sailor decides to purchase the knife despite its dark past...



The Lighthouse of Saint Theodore

One of the most well known sights on the coastal road from Argosotli to Lassi is the Lighthouse of Saint Theodore. It is named after the nearby church, though the whole region is now commonly known as 'Fanari' (lighthouse). The original lighthouse was built in 1828 by the British administrator Charles Napier, who ruled the island that time.

It is a circular structure with 24 columns and its tower is 8 m tall. The building has a rather simple and Doric architectural style, while its focal plane is 11 m. In 1863, after the integration of the island to the Greek State, this lighthouse was included in the lighthouse network of Greece.

The earthquake of 1953 was pretty devastating for Kefalonia and the other Ionian islands and also destroyed the lighthouse. It was rebuilt in 1960 by the local architect Takis Pavlatos according to its original architectural design. The lighthouse of Saint Theodore works till today and gives a romantic view at night. It is found 3 km from Argosotli, close to Katavothres, or you will see it if you take the boat to Lixouri town.

Lighthouse of Saint Theodore: Then and Now



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Photos of Kefalonia past, after the earthquake of 1953 and wartime

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Beltziniti Matoula (pages 14, 15, 25)

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